

WORSHIP:
GATEWAY TO TAWHĪD. . .
AND TO TAKFĪR

Dr. Ḥātim al-Sharīf's
discussion on *al-'ibādah*

Translated by:
Farhan Siddiqi

Worship: Gateway to Tawḥīd. . . and to Takfīr

By: Dr. Ḥātim ibn 'Arif al-'Awnī al-Sharīf

Translated by: Farḥān Ṣiddīqī

Translator's Introduction	2
Changes to version 1.1	4
Introduction	5
[Use of the term 'Worship']	7
Worship (General Usage)	8
Worship (Specific Usage)	11
Two Examples of Misconceptions Regarding (tawḥīd)	27
The First Mindset:	27
The Second Mindset:	29
Closing	30
Footnotes	31

Translator's Introduction

All praise is due to Allāh, we seek from him guidance in this world and ask him to bless us with his paradise in the next, for He has unrestricted ability, while ours is finite.

This article¹ is one that I found to be one of the most eye opening discussions on the issue of worship that I have come across in my studies. For me it was a complete paradigm shift in how to approach *tawḥīd*², belief, disbelief, *takfīr*³, *rūbūbiyah*⁴, and most obviously: worship.

It also served as a severe blow to extremist understandings of the reality of worship and the general misunderstanding of ‘*‘aqīdah*’⁵.

I am hopeful that this translation will serve to open the eyes of Muslim readers, just as the original opened mine. I also hope it will be a means for guidance, promotion of tolerance, and true understanding between the Muslims as a whole. It is my conviction that it presents a sound portrayal of Islām’s true teaching on this subject and its effect on others.

Lastly, this piece will be added as an addendum to Dr. Hātim’s book on “*Takfīr* of those Who Make the Two Testimonies of Faith”, when its translation becomes available, inshAllāh.

¹ The original article is available here:

http://nama-center.com/ImagesGallary/photoGallary/pdf/nama_pdf_002.pdf

² In summary, belief in Allāh’s oneness. This is expounded on throughout the discussion.

³ *Takfīr* is to judge someone to have left the fold of Islām.

⁴ The belief in the perfection of Allāh, our Lord, in all His abilities and His uniqueness.

⁵ The science that revolves around Islāmic theology

We ask Allāh to bless us and make this a way to seek
His nearness and pleasure. Ameen.

Farḥān Ṣiddīqī
Fords, NJ, USA
6/24/1439

Changes to version 1.1

The initial translation was very rough and unclear in a number of areas. Alhamdulillah that has been minimized with this version. Diacritical marks in addition to additional clarification notes have also been added.

I would like to thank Mustafa Mahmud for his insight and taking out the time to edit this version. May Allah reward him and all those that helped with this piece with the best in this world and the next. Ameen.

Introduction

Whenever the word worship is mentioned, the first thing that comes to mind is the most important of all relationships. Namely, the relationship of man to his Creator, Glorified and Exalted is He. It is the reason for the existence of mankind and jinn:

((وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ))

((I only created jinn and mankind to worship Me))
(51:56)

What is this ‘worship’ by which we actualize *tawhīd*, the greatest of all deeds? This *tawhīd*, by which the greatest of all mankind's sins, *shirk*⁶, occurs?

What is this concept of ‘worship’ which – when understood properly - differentiates the monotheist believer from the polytheist disbeliever?

The answer to these questions show us the great importance of properly conceptualizing worship and the grave danger of misunderstanding it.

This is what I aim to clarify in this short article. This piece is the product of a deep and lengthy contemplation. I initially intended to hold off on writing this article until I could write a full-length book expounding on the issue, enumerating the different positions that have been written. I intended on analyzing their respective methodologies, identifying their valid points and errors, and responding to false or erroneous arguments.

⁶ Arabic for “associating partners with Allāh”. This concept is further clarified through the course of this treatise.

However, as time passed and I put off this project, I decided to publish the conclusion and outcomes (as they are called) before the entire thesis. I understand that this is contrary to the customary practice of publishing outcomes in the concluding chapter of a thesis.

I resorted to this unconventional approach for two reasons:

1. Fulfill my obligation to clarify this issue before I pass away or other tasks preoccupy me.
2. Though it is brief, this article contains sufficient clarification and evidence to address this issue for the reader who reads it carefully, putting aside previous biases. The one who differentiates between the essential (*muḥkamāt*) and the ambiguous (*mutashābihāt*), understanding the ambiguous in light of the essential, not vice versa.⁷

⁷ This is an allusion to verse Qur'ān 3:7: "He is the one who has revealed to you the Book containing clear verses (*āyāt muḥkamāt*), these are the foundation of the Book, and others that are ambiguous (*mutashābihāt*). As for those in whose hearts there is corruption, they eagerly pursue the ambiguities in their attempt to stir trouble and to pin down a specific meaning of their own. But none truly knows their meaning but Allāh and those firmly grounded in knowledge. They say, 'We believe in it. All of it is from our Lord,' but only men of understanding truly take heed."

For a more in depth discussion, see Dr. Ḥatim's work "*Al-Muḥkamāt*", may Allāh hasten its translation.

[Use of the term 'Worship']

I begin by presenting my introduction to this vitally important subject by stating:

(Worship) - is used in two ways:

1. General
2. Specific

Worship (General Usage)

The general usage of (worship) encompasses all that a believer is rewarded for. This includes:

- Drawing nearer to Allāh (the Most High) in different types of ritual worship (such as ritual prayer or ritual fasting)
- Being good to others
- Being dutiful to one's parents
- Maintaining family ties
- Good dealings with people, and creation in general

This usage of “worship” can be defined as “a comprehensive term that encompasses all statements and actions - hidden or apparent - that Allāh loves and is pleased with.”⁸

While appropriate to define worship in this fashion (in accordance with its broader usage), this definition of worship does not clarify the difference between *tawhīd* and *shirk*. What is actually meant when we say worship is only allowed for Allāh, and when directed to other than Allāh constitutes *shirk*?

Take the example of being dutiful to one's parents or having good dealings with others. These actions can be devoid of the intention of drawing near to Allāh. In spite of that, we would never say that the one performing either of those actions is a sinner or even a *mushrik*. This individual may be good to his parents, or to others without having any intention of worship. His intention might only be to honor and respect them and to attain happiness and self-satisfaction. He accomplishes this by bringing happiness to those who have been kind to him.

⁸ This popular definition is taken from Shaykh al-Islām ibn Taymiyah. See: ‘Majmū‘ al fatāwā’ (16/149)

None of these actions are sinful, nor are they *shirk*. That person however, will not be entitled to any reward for good deeds (1). These would simply be permissible actions which neither draw one near to Allāh nor distance one from Him.

This is even clearer when someone does something for his own benefit. Examples include eating and drinking to maintain his body's strength, or sleeping in order to rest it, or fulfilling one's lusts in a lawful fashion (2). In fact, performing any action that would benefit your physical body. All of these actions are permissible and incur neither sin nor reward. The only exception would be when an individual consciously does them with the intention of gaining strength to do that which pleases Allāh, or to stay away from that which angers Him.

In these cases, eating and drinking would both be "worship" for which one is rewarded. They would constitute "worship" in the broader sense, not because they are intrinsically acts of worship, but because of the person's intention.

This is worship in its general sense, which has been defined as: "a comprehensive word that encompasses all statements and actions - hidden or apparent - that Allāh loves and is pleased with." When worship is used in this general fashion we can say that it simply means "obedience" that draws us nearer to Allāh the Most High. This broader sense of worship encompasses:

- all ritual acts of worship (*'ibādāt maḥḍah*)
- permissible customary actions (*'ādāt mubāḥah*) by which an individual consciously intends to draw nearer to Allāh

This includes

- loving Allāh

- being thankful to Him for lawful blessings that we enjoy
- avoiding acts of disobedience to Allāh,
- utilizing permissible things - be they essential necessities, general needs, or merely desirables - to strengthen ourselves in doing that which pleases Allāh.

You will note that this definition does not clarify the meaning of “worship” that is intended when we discuss worship of Allāh alone (*tawḥīd al-‘ibādāh*). It does not clarify the kind of worship that, when directed toward other than Allāh, makes a person a polytheist (*mushrik*). According to this definition, the word worship refers as much to eating and drinking (with the intention of strengthening ones body to help in his obedience to Allāh) as it does with ritual fasting and ritual prayer. Clearly, such a general usage of the term worship is not helpful in distinguishing *tawḥīd* in worship from *shirk* in worship.

This is why one of the most serious errors in understanding *tawḥīd* and *shirk* is not actually defining what worship actually is! How will one who does not properly define “worship” relative to how it is used in the discussion of *tawḥīd* in worship be able to distinguish *shirk* in *‘ibādāh* from *tawḥīd* in *‘ibādāh*?

If we have summarily described the first use of “worship”, which is the general meaning, then it remains for this article to explain the second use, which is its specific meaning. It is this definition that will help us identify the difference between *tawḥīd* and *shirk* in respect to worship.

Worship (Specific Usage)

“Worship” in its specific sense is: glorifying the one who controls all of creation, the one who owns the kingdom, the one who manages all affairs, the one who is described with absolute perfection -all attributes which are specific to His lordship-.

In other words: “worship” is glorifying You -by means of love, fear and hope- while recognizing what is specific to Your lordship.

All of the above attributes represent specific descriptions of lordship and shirk occurs when any individual attribute is attributed to other than Allāh (the Most High) as we will clarify.

When misunderstood, there are two types of “worship” that become confused:

1. A general understanding of worship that permits an individual to perform that ‘worship’ for other than Allāh.⁹
2. A specific understanding of worship that would cause an individual to fall into *shirk*.¹⁰

If we analyze the general understanding of “worship”, then theoretically it can be limited in two ways:

1. By looking at the action itself:
 - a. a righteous action that is rewarded or
 - b. an unrighteous action that is punished.
2. By looking at that which affects the action:
 - a. having the correct intention and following religious commandments or

⁹ As was clarified in the previous section, which include: honoring guests/parents, drinking water, etc.

¹⁰ As will, by Allāh’s aid, be clarified in this section.

- b. not having the correct intention and/or disobeying religious commandments

It is not possible in either scenario that “worship” in these particular viewpoints would cause an individual to fall into *shirk*.

Subsequently, intention in worship (in its specific meaning), is either singling out Allāh in worship, or sharing partners with Him. This can be done in a minor way (by doing it for others’ approval), or in a major way (by ascribing to another an attribute specific to His lordship). There is no other possibility, unlike in the general definition of “worship”.

In order to understand where this definition came from, I will present two actions that the slave of Allāh normally performs: the first being an action in his heart, and the second being an action in his limbs.

The first action: Love. All of us know that the greatest action a slave can perform in his heart toward his Lord is love, and that he is not a true believer except with it. We also know that loving the Prophet is itself worship. Our belief is not correct except by our love of him, (ﷺ). Our belief is incomplete until we love him (ﷺ) more than our parents, our children, all of mankind, and even ourselves.

So, what is the difference between our love of Allāh -the Most High- and our love of the Prophet (ﷺ)?

What is the defining factor of *shirk* in our love for the Prophet (ﷺ)? In other words, what is the criteria with which we warn the people regarding love of the Prophet so that their love does not become extremism that reaches the level of *shirk*?

One may say: It is to love him as you love Allāh the Most High.

I say: What is this love for Allāh -the Most High- that is not permissible for anyone beside him?

The only possible answer is to say: It is loving in a way that is unique to His lordship, because you have deified this beloved with this love. You have worshipped Him with your heart.

Loving the Prophet (ﷺ), no matter how high it reaches, is an increase in one's belief. That is, until it reaches the point of equivocating, in any way to the one who controls all of creation, the one who owns the kingdom, the one who manages all affairs, the one who is described with absolute perfection. At this point your love has become *shirk*.

Similar to love, is fear. Fear is among the greatest types of worship one can perform with his heart. This worship is not permissible to perform for anyone other than Allāh, the Most High, the Singular. This takes into account the fact that you may greatly fear other creation also. It is possible a person dies due to fear because a predator surprised him, while he would not die or faint due to his fear of Allāh the Most High. Even with this level of fear, he would not be called a *mushrik*. This is because fear of a predator is fearing creation, which you know is not your Lord¹¹. The moment that you fear it because of a characteristic of a deity¹² then you have made it a lord with this fear, and have committed *shirk*.

The second action: Prostrating for Allāh the Most High. It is an apparent action done with the limbs. Concerning that: Yā'qub -'alayhi al-salām- prostrated to Allāh,

¹¹ The one who controls all of creation, the one who owns the kingdom, the one who manages all affairs, the one who is described with absolute perfection.

¹² As mentioned in the previous footnote

((أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ مِنْ ذُرِّيَةِ آدَمَ وَمِمَّنْ حَمَلْنَا مَعَ نُوحٍ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَةِ
إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْرَائِيلَ وَمِمَّنْ هَدَيْنَا وَاجْتَبَيْنَا إِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُ الرَّحْمَنِ خَرُّوا سُجَّدًا وَبُكِيًّا))
((These were the prophets Allāh blessed- from the
seed of 'Ādam, of those We carried in the Ark with Nūḥ,
from the seed of Ibrāhīm and Isrā'īl- and those We
guided and chose. When the revelations of the Lord of
Mercy were recited to them, they prostrated and wept,))
(19:58)

and he prostrated to his son, Yūsuf,
((وَرَفَعَ أَبَوَيْهِ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ وَخَرُّوا لَهُ سُجَّدًا))
((and took them up to [his] throne. They all prostrated
down before him)) (12:100).

Yā'qub surely differentiated, as clear as day from night,
between these two prostrations. This differentiation is
blatantly clear, as distinctly clear as singling out Allāh
alone sincerely from sharing partners with Him!

Notice that the verb here is one: prostrate [in both
verses]. So, how did Yā'qub differentiate between these
two prostrations; one for Allāh the Most High, and one
for Yūsuf - 'alayhi al-salām-?

Similarly, the angels prostrate to Allāh,
((إِنَّ الَّذِينَ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِهِ وَيُسَبِّحُونَهُ وَلَهُ يَسْجُدُونَ))

(([even] those who live in the presence of your Lord
are not too proud to worship Him: they glorify Him and
prostrate before Him.)) (7:206).

Their Lord also ordered them to prostrate to 'Ādam, so
every one of them prostrated,

((وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا))
((When We told the angels, 'Prostrate before 'Ādam,' they
all prostrated.)) (2:34).

Now, how is it possible that the prostration that they
made for Allāh, worshipping Allāh, something
praiseworthy, but their prostration for 'Ādam not being
worship?

There is only one inescapable answer: The prostration of Yā'qub to Yūsuf, and the prostration of the angels to 'Ādam was creation prostrating to creation. [It was] not creation prostrating to the creator, nor was it to the one who holds all of creation, the owner of this kingdom, the one who manages all affairs, the one who is described with absolute perfection. This is why the prostration to Yūsuf and to 'Ādam had no element of *shirk* to it, nor even a hint of it!

I would like to point out: I am not speaking about the ruling concerning prostration within our tradition. It is impermissible for other than Allāh in our religion. The ruling for prostrating to other than Allāh in the message of Muḥammad is different than the ruling in other traditions, but *tawḥīd* does not differ between the different traditions, which is the focus of our discussion. Additionally, there is no relationship between something being impermissible, and an action being *shirk*. Prostrating to other than Allāh is impermissible, but it is not *shirk*, except if he intends behind it an attribute that is unique to Allāh's lordship.

Similarly, you will find a stark difference between standing for your parents, your teacher, or anyone who you hold in high regard and the difference in standing for Allāh during the ritual prayer. You are worshipping with this standing. The Messenger of Allāh was asked, "What is the best prayer?" He said, "Elongating your *qunūt*."¹³ i.e. elongating your standing. This internal sense of glorification and respect via your standing is in no way similar to your glorification and reverence when you stand for Allāh the Most High. This reverence for creation by standing will never surpass reverence for

¹³ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim #756

creation that is similar to you. You will not stand for him as if he is a creator, the owner of this kingdom, the one who manages all affairs, the one who is described with absolute perfection. This would clearly differ from your standing for Allāh, because when you stand for Allāh, you are standing for your Lord, the creator, the owner of this kingdom, the one who manages all affairs, the one who is described with absolute perfection.

Through this discussion we see that the reality of worship is a specific action of the heart. It does not deviate except to the belief that object of worship is the creator, the owner of this kingdom, the one who manages all affairs, the one who is described with absolute perfection. As for actions in the limbs, then there are those that are

- Permissible (like standing in reverence for your parents),
- Impermissible (like prostrating to other than Allāh)

Then these are not acts of worship except if that standing or prostration incorporate those attributes that are specific to lordship.

This would apply to all superficial actions such as sacrificing an animal for your guest, one that you honor and revere. It is very possible that you would not do that for someone you do not hold in reverence and feed him that which you deem acceptable (taking local customs into account, in this case those specific to the Arabs). On the other end: you sacrifice for Allāh, in reverence to him in order to fulfil the ritual rites of *ḥajj*, general sacrifice, or fulfilling an oath. This is done seeking nearness to your lord, the creator, the owner of this kingdom, the one who manages all affairs, the one who is described with absolute perfection.

This applies to all superficial actions that carry the possibility of either venerating someone from the creation, or the creator himself. It would not be considered worship except if he was venerating, by that action, by incorporating those attributes that are specific to lordship.

So, whoever attributes any lordly attributes to other than Allāh the Most High, and defines that being as being separate and unique, or having the ability to challenge Allāh's kingdoms or rules, then he is a *mushrik*.

At this point I would like to point out something critical, that this attribution can take two forms:

Firstly: the belief that an individual is independent from Allāh concerning an attribute that is unique to his lordship, then this is clear *shirk*. This is the situation that necessitates the belief of numerous deities. For example, idolatrous polytheistic religions that attribute qualities of lordship to a number of different deities, similar to the Greek gods.

This is the common image of *shirk*, the one that most modern polemic schools of thought base their thoughts off of, without taking the following, second image in mind.

Secondly: the belief that there is a being present that has the ability to challenge:

- the creator in his creation or
- the owner of this kingdom in his ownership or
- the one who manages all affairs in how he manages those affairs

Without need of his complete acceptance or permission. Or that being has the ability to:

- Take from his divine will

This would also be considered *shirk*, even if the person that holds this belief also believes that Allāh the Most

High is the creator, the owner of this kingdom and the one who manages all affairs. This is because this ability to take from His will opposes the characteristic of true sovereignty through those attributes of lordship, and nullify absolute perfection.¹⁴

This is what many of the Arabs of *jāhilīyah* believed, that Allāh the Most High was the creator, provider and the one who manages all affairs as in,

((وَلَيْنَ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ))

((If you [Prophet] ask them, ‘Who created the heavens and earth?’ they are sure to answer, ‘Allāh’)) (39:38)

and

((وَلَيْنَ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ نَزَّلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَحْيَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَوْتِهَا لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ قُلِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ))

((If you ask them, ‘Who sends water down from the sky and gives life with it to the earth after it has died?’ they are sure to say, ‘Allāh.’ Say, ‘Praise belongs to Allāh!’ Truly, most of them do not use their reason.)) (29:63).

But, they believed that these deities had an effect on this lord’s abilities and commands. The conditions of the Arabs of *jāhilīyah* in their *shirk* ridden perverted image was similar to that of a king and his viceroys. The kingdom was for its owner, but the viceroys had authority and major roles in state affairs. The owner himself could not completely override his viceroys, even if it was only sometimes. Even though the kingdom was technically under his control, they still had a great influence on state affairs, and he would be compelled to submit to their

¹⁴ An appropriate example of this is the Greek and Roman deities. They believed the supreme deity Zeus created all the other deities and he was master over all of them. Even Zeus, being this master deity, did not prevent him from being challenged by these smaller deities which he himself created!

requests, due to his need of them, even if occasionally. Allāh is greater than such a primitive need.

This is the image that many of the polytheistic Arabs held concerning their deities that they worshipped along with Allāh the Most High. This type of *shirk* is in disposition and management. This is taking from Allāh's ownership, his ability to rule his kingdom, and He is greater than such a lowly need.

Concerning disposition and managing Allāh's kingdom with his permission, then this does not oppose *tawhīd*. This does not attribute any attribute specific to lordship to other than him. We believe that there are angels that have been delegated the authority of providing sustenance, taking souls for death, and that some of his slaves have been delegated other abilities by his permission. Such is the case with the Savior¹⁵ - 'alayhi al-salām-,

أَنِّي أَخْلُقُ لَكُمْ مِنَ الطِّينِ كَهَيْئَةِ الطَّيْرِ فَأَنْفُخُ فِيهِ فَيَكُونُ طَيْرًا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَأُبْرِئُ الْأَكْمَةَ وَالْأَبْرَصَ))
((وَأُحْيِي الْمَوْتَى بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَأُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا تَأْكُلُونَ وَمَا تَدْخِرُونَ فِي بُيُوتِكُمْ))

((I will make the shape of a bird for you out of clay, then breathe into it and, with Allāh's permission, it will become a real bird; I will heal the blind and the leper, and bring the dead back to life with Allāh's permission; I will tell you what you may eat and what you may store up in your houses.)) (3:49)

Each one of these characteristics are unique to lordship¹⁶, because they consist of either creation, disposition, or managing affairs that are unique to a Lord. None of this takes away from lordship though. This is because the creation performed these acts by the permission of Allāh the Most High

¹⁵ He is referring to 'Īsā - 'alayhi al-salām-

¹⁶ Such as creation, providing sustenance and bringing the life back from death, etc.

- WITHOUT Allāh having any need of his creation in those situations and
- WITHOUT taking away from Allāh's kingdom or complete reign over his subjects.

This is why these two types of sharing partners:

1. the *shirk* of multiples creators, owners, and those that manage all affairs, and
2. the *shirk* of needing a protector due to weakness

Allāh freed himself from such shortcomings in his statement:

((وَقُلِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي لَمْ يَتَّخِذْ وَلَدًا وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ شَرِيكٌ فِي الْمُلْكِ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ وَلِيٌّ مِنَ الذَّلِيلِ وَكَبِّرْهُ تَكْبِيرًا))

((and say, 'Praise belongs to Allāh, who has no child nor partner in His rule. He is not so weak as to need a protector. Proclaim His limitless greatness!')) (17:111)

Ibn Jarīr (d. 310 H;923 CE) in his *tafsīr* concerning this verse says, "[Allāh] -whose mention be raised- mentions to his prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ): and say Muḥammad, all praise belongs to Allāh ((who has no child nor partner)): [because] then He would be a lesser lord, not a Lord [in his own right]. A lord of lords is not befitting of bearing children. ((nor partner in His rule)), [because] this would necessitate inability and reliance on another, showing weakness. A being is not a deity if he is in need of another to fulfill needs. [He would also not be considered a deity] if he is not alone in his kingdom and sovereignty. ((He is not so weak as to need a protector.)) meaning: There is no one who made a treaty with him due to his weakness. If he were in need of aid of another, then he is weak and lowly. Whoever is weak, lowly and in need of one to give him victory is not a deity that deserves obedience. ((Proclaim His limitless greatness!)) meaning: honor your lord, oh Muḥammad, with

whatever we have ordered you to, whether that be in statement or action, obey him in his commandments and stay away from his prohibitions.

Similarly, we mentioned in his statement, ((He is not so weak as to need a protector.)), the scholars of *tafsīr* have stated . . . (he mentions his chain of narration to Mujāhid [concerning Allāh's statement], ((He is not so weak as to need a protector.)): He has a treaty with no one, nor does he desire anyone's aid. (3)

Ibn Kathīr (774 H;1373 CE) mentions in his *tafsīr*: ((He is not so weak as to need a protector.)) i.e. he is not weak, so he is not in need of a protector, minister, or advisor. In actuality, he is the lone creator of all without partner, the one who manages all, the one who determines the end of all according to his lone will, without partner. (4)

Sudī (127 H;745 CE) preceded them both in his *tafsīr* saying, ((He is not so weak as to need a protector.)) seeking support through him. (5)

Ibn Abī Zamanāyn (399 H;1009 CE) said: ((and say, 'Praise belongs to Allāh, who has no child')) in order to increase in number. ((nor partner in His rule.)): another who created along with him. ((He is not so weak as to need a protector.)): seeking support through him (6).

This image of a protector due to weakness is one that many later day Islāmic educational institutes have become oblivious to. They have managed to confine the *shirk* of the Arabs to superficial actions of the limbs alone even if that action is not coupled with a belief in the heart of the lordship of that individual. This obliviousness is why individuals remove others from the fold of Islām even if those people have made the two testifications of faith!

Whoever thinks that the *shirk* of the Arabs is outside the two portraits of *shirk*, then he has majorly erred! He has brought something that any sane individual would reject!

The bedouin Arab would seek from another who is in similar status to him to aid and support him. He would request from his deity to aid and support him also. So, what is in that Arabs heart that made him a polytheist when seeking from his deity? And what is it that prevented him from deifying others when he sought from them?

This bedouin Arab turned to this presumed deity because he felt that this [deity] had the ability to affect Allāh's order, [similar] to the scenario of the weak seeking support, as our Lord mentions in his noble book. [Allāh] clarifies that the belief of a believer would resist ascribing such a shortcoming to him. Their hearts and tongues would turn to praising and exonerating him, ((who has no child nor partner in His rule. He is not so weak as to need a protector.)).

As for those who are insistent concerning the verse,

((وَالَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ مَا نَعْبُدُهُمْ إِلَّا لِيُقَرِّبُونَا إِلَى اللَّهِ زُلْفَى))

(([As for] those who choose other protectors beside Him, saying, 'We only worship them because they bring us nearer to Allāh,') (39:3)

that the *shirk* of the Arabs of *jāhilīyah* was *shirk* in their worship not in their rejection of *tawhīd* in Allāh's lordship. This is persistence on falsehood, unsupported by the true understanding of worship. The reality of worship is that it is not negated except if there is an ascription of lordship to the object being worshipped.

The Arabs were the most versed in regards to the meaning of the word "worship", which is why the verse

clearly states ((We only worship them. . .)). It does not mention any other phrase, like:

- “We sought from them. . .” or even
- “We exalt them. . .”

Because the words “sought” and “exalt” do not correctly represent the reality of worship. Both of these terms are an appropriate phrasing for creation addressing a creator though. If you were to say, “I exalt the prophets and the righteous and I exalt the Ka’bah.” Similarly, you could say, “I exalt Allāh, the lord of all mankind.” There is no difference in this exaltation save the fact that your exaltation concerning Allāh the Most High is that of a slave toward his lord, a creation toward his creator. This is why the Arabs expressed that which projects their reality, which is the word “worship”.

This meaning is the one that has been made apparent throughout our discussion. Concerning actions, whether they be of the heart or superficial, then there is no difference whether they are “worship” or not. The only exception would be if the intention behind that action was seeking nearness toward that being who possesses attributes unique to lordship. Beside that, it is impossible for a Muslim to love, fear, or hope from anyone other than Allāh the Most High, except that he would considered a polytheist if he did so!

Shaykh al-Islām ibn Taymīyah also affirms this in his statement, “He, may his mention be praised, clarifies that he alone is worthy of worship, without worshipping another. There is none similar to him. He [also] possesses qualities of perfection, a quality that all others worshipped other than him lack. He [also] clarifies that he is above those that are associated with him, in addition to being free of any false claims they make of him, [whether] it be ascribing children or partners to him.

[Concerning] his statement,

((قُلْ لَوْ كَانَ مَعَهُ آلِهَةٌ كَمَا يَقُولُونَ إِذًا لَابْتَغَوْا إِلَىٰ ذِي الْعَرْشِ سَبِيلًا))

((Say, 'If there were other gods along with Him, as they say there are, then they would have tried to find a way to the Lord of the Throne.')) (17:42),

they claimed that they would intercede on their behalf and would draw them nearer to Him. They would attribute this intercession without His permission, i.e. this intercession would be in the creation's hands, which is a type of *shirk*. This is why Allāh says,

((وَلَا يَمْلِكُ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ الشَّفَاعَةَ إِلَّا مَنْ شَهِدَ بِالْحَقِّ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ))

((Those gods they invoke besides Him have no power of intercession, unlike those who bore witness to the truth and recognized it.)) (43:86),

showing that no one possesses this intercession beside Allāh (7).

Here, Shaykh al-Islām clarifies the type of *shirk* the polytheists committed with their idols concerning intercession. [Plainly] stated, in his own words, as, "They would attribute intercession without his permission."

Even with such clarity, I will mention here a number of texts from the Qur'an, excluding the previously mentioned verse from Sūrah al-Isrā' ((He is not so weak as to need a protector.)), showing how the polytheists viewed their deities.

The most high says,

((أَمْ لَهُمْ آلِهَةٌ تَمْنَعُهُمْ مِنْ دُونِنَا لَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ نَصْرَ أَنفُسِهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ مِنَّْا يُصْحَبُونَ))

((Do they have gods who can defend them against Us?

Their gods have no power to help themselves, nor can they be protected from Us.)) (21:43).

In this verse Allāh defines the false belief of the Arabs concerning their deities and how they defend them from Allāh, and protect them from him.

Ibn Kathīr mentions in his *tafsīr* concerning the verse, ((Do they have gods who can defend them against Us?)), then this is an “invalidatory question”¹⁷, used to reproach and reprimand. Meaning, do they have deities that defend and protect them other than us? It is not as you suppose or claim (8).

The Arab used to assume and claim (as ibn Kathīr mentions) that the sovereignty of their deities superseded the sovereignty of Allāh the Most High, even if on occasion. This is why those Arabs understood to worship their deities. Deification does not actually occur except in this meaning. Had this not been the case, the Arab would equate their deities to other creation, whether they be another individual, stone or tree!

Allāh states, ((Say, ‘If there were other gods along with Him, as they say there are, then they would have tried to find a way to the Lord of the Throne.’)). In it, has clarified to the polytheist Arabs, had we compared belief in your deities -with the assumption that it is actually correct- and they actually possessed qualities unique to lordship this would necessitate them challenging Allāh’s sovereignty and kingdom (9). This binding statement does not hold true except if they actually attributed characteristics unique to lordship to their idols. Let us assume that the polytheist Arabs did not believe that their idols had characteristics unique to lordship, and that they were creation similar to them, without the ability to manage creation or ordain commandments, except if it is under Allāh’s complete sovereignty, his lone control and management. They would answer this verse with, how do

¹⁷ Basically a question used to belittle the subject being questioned. A common phrase in English that would be representative of that when someone makes a mistake and you say to him, “Do I look like your father?”

you force this understanding on us? [You are claiming] that we see these idols as helpless slaves, without the ability to pass ordinances or commands. How is possible that these beings challenge the one that created them then? What kind of response is that, with [attributes] that we [supposedly] do not find in these helpless creations?

This verse clearly defines the reality of worship in the verse, ((‘We only worship them because they bring us nearer to Allāh,’)). [Their worship encompassed] glorifying to the point that they ascribed attributes of lordship to other than Allāh, the Most High.

Even if there is a difference of understanding on how to approach texts, in the previously mentioned verses, then I present the next two verses. These verses are absolutely clear in their intended meaning and do not carry the same possibility in differing in how to understand them.

Allāh says, ((Allāh has never had a child. Nor is there any god beside Him- if there were, each god would have taken his creation aside and tried to overcome the others. May Allāh be exalted above what they describe!)).

He also states, ((If there had been in the heavens or earth any gods but Him, both heavens and earth would be in ruins: Allāh, Lord of the Throne, is far above the things they say:))

Two Examples of Misconceptions Regarding (*tawḥīd*)

From the above presentation we can see the difference between the two following mindsets that many later day [writers] present:

The First Mindset:

They consider the frame of reference for expelling an individual from Islām when he shares partners in his worship, with no relation to *tawḥīd* in lordship. They claim that the polytheist Arabs did not fall into *shirk* in this lordship. What actually caused this breach was that they performed superficial actions directed toward other than Allāh the Most High.

The claimants of this view do not differentiate between what particular actions actually defile *shirk* in lordship, and what actions do not. They consider the frame of reference for expelling one from Islām when he shares partners in superficial worship, without realizing in reality it is defined as a breach in *tawḥīd* of lordship.

What actually holds true is

- There is no limit to prohibitions in regard to leaving off worship specific to lordship
- *Takfīr* is limited to *shirk* in worship whenever an individual leaves off worship specific to lordship

This breach in lordship is virtually unknown (especially those who make the two testifications of faith) by simply directing an apparent action of worship to other than Allāh, that would normally not be permissible to other than him. As long as those people declare the two testifications of faith it is not allowed to expel them from

the fold of Islām. The exception to this would be if we knew for a fact that he performed this superficial action (like prostration) with the intent of breaching this lordship. If this became blatantly clear, then he is a disbeliever. Such individuals would not be excused by claiming ignorance, and that we should still proclaim Islām for them, because these people (the same ones that breached *tawḥīd* in lordship) are the ones that, in reality, are similar to the polytheist Arabs. Like their statement, “I am at Your service, O Allāh, I am at Your service. You have no partner, except for the partners that are for you. You own him while he owns nothing.” This statement completely contradicts itself regarding *tawḥīd*; by them saying that which negates it, a clear discrepancy.

The Second Mindset:

They have defined prohibited actions to that which would be considered sharing partners in worship without taking into account those actions that the *Shari'ah* considers impermissible. This happened because they did not understand some of those claimed impermissible actions the *Shari'ah* actually allows in regards to honoring other creation. Some of those being individuals who are considered upright and righteous performing them. This group allowed:

- Circumambulating graves
- Sacrificing near them, or for them in order to honor the deceased individual
- Prostrating and wiping your hands over particular graves
- Seeking fulfillment of personal needs by these dead individuals by means of intercession with Allāh

All of this done out of ignorance of the fact that these actions are impermissible and incorrect, even if done with the best of creation Muḥammad (ﷺ).

Closing

In closing, it becomes clear that the truth lies between those two mindsets. The first mindset does not realize the impermissibility of making *takfīr* on those individuals who are undeserving of it. The second mindset is mistaken in that they take superficial acts of worship that are unique to Allāh's lordship, and allow it to be directed toward others. They permit it with the claim that they have not violated Allāh's lordship in that.

Both of these mistakes could clearly have been avoided had the true meaning of "worship" been apparent to both parties.

I ask Allāh to bring our hearts together on truth, and to forgive us of our shortcomings and mistakes.

And Allāh surely knows best.

Footnotes

1. I began by stating ‘possibly’ because there is some speech that is unrelated to this research. This becomes clearer with the second example; eating, drinking and sleeping. All of those are of no benefit to others.
2. In an authentic *ḥadīth*: “In your intimacy there is charity. They responded, ‘If one of us fulfills our desires we are rewarded for that?!’ He said, ‘If you were intimate with someone not permissible to you, would you not be accountable for that? This also applies to that which is permissible, then he is rewarded.’” The *ḥadīth* itself clarifies the stipulation of receiving reward, which is by performing this act he has protected himself from falling into what is impermissible. He further clarifies the intention -from among other intentions- that necessitates an individual who fulfills his desire reward from Allāh good deeds. That intention is guarding oneself from the impermissible, with the permissible. This holds true without a shadow of a doubt, especially when this *ḥadīth* is juxtaposed with the determinant, absolute maxim found in his statement, “Actions are surely judged by their intentions, so everyone will be judged on what he intended. Whoever migrates for Allāh and his Messenger, then his migration is for them, and whoever migrates for this world or in order to marry a woman, then his journey will be for what he intended.”
3. Tafsīr at Ṭabarī (15/137-138)

4. Tafsīr ibn Kathīr (5/130)
5. Tafsīr Yaḥyā ibn Salām (1/169)
6. Tafsīr ibn Abī Zamanāyn (3/46)
7. Majmū' al fatāwá (16/121-122)
8. Tafsīr ibn Kathīr (5/344)
9. Shaykh Muḥammad al Amīn ash Shanqītī mentions in Aḍwā' al-bayān: This noble verse can be understood in two ways, both of them correct, the Qur'ān supporting both. We mentioned in the introduction to this blessed book, "This verse can be understood in two ways, both of them correct, the Qur'ān supporting this. Out of integrity we will mention both understandings:

The First: Had there been another lord beside Allāh, as the disbelievers claim ((would have tried)) i.e. this claimed deity would want ((the Lord of the Throne.)) i.e. to Allāh ((a way)). Meaning: They would have sought a way to overthrow him and conquer his kingdom, as they would be equal to him, similar to how kings deal with one another. All praise to Allāh, who is majestic and high above such trivialities. This is one statement, concerning the meaning of the verse, which is apparent to me, the first to come to mind. Some verses that support his understanding include, ((Allāh has never had a child. Nor is there any god beside Him- if there were, each god would have taken his creation aside and tried to overcome the others. May Allāh be exalted above what they describe! He knows what is not seen as well as what is seen; He is far above any partner they claim for Him.)) (23:91-92) and ((If there had been in the heavens or earth any gods but Him, both heavens and earth would be in ruins: Allāh, Lord of the Throne, is far above the things

they say)) (21:22). This is the meaning that has been narrated on ibn 'Abbās, Sa'id ibn Jubayr, Abū 'Alī al-Fārisī, an Nuqāsh, Abū Manṣūr, and other than them from the scholars of *kalām*¹⁸.

The Second: The meaning of ((then they would have tried to find a way to the Lord of the Throne.)) i.e. taken them as a means and intermediary to draw nearer to him, recognizing his virtue. This is supported by Allāh's statement, ((Those [angels] they pray to are themselves seeking a way to their Lord, even those who are closest to Him. They hope for His mercy and fear His punishment.)) (17:57). This understanding is narrated on Qatādah and is the one that ibn Kathīr sufficed with in his *tafsīr*.

No doubt the first meaning is the one that first comes to mind from a purely linguistic standpoint. This is because of the impossible situation that is created in the verse itself, which is the presence of a deity of equal standing with Allāh. What would be the purpose of drawing near when the deity is of equal standing? This creates an impossible situation and Allāh has knowledge of all affairs. Aḍwā' al-bayān (3/-595-595)

Also see: 'al-Basīṭ by al-Wāḥidī (13/343-344), 'al-Wasīṭ' by the same author (3/109), 'al-Muḥarrir al-wajīz' by Ibn 'Aṭīyah (5/484-485), and 'Rumūz al-kunūz' by Ras'anī (4/174). Shaykh al-Islām ibn Taymīyah ascribes the first understanding to Sufyān al-Thawrī [in his 'Majmū'] (16/122)

¹⁸ The study of Islamic theology within the *Māturīdī* and *Ash'arī* schools of polemic thought.

Why this Book?

Worship is the most important relationship an individual can have with his creator. It is the single action that defines his Islām, so why is a discussion of it so convoluted? This treatise is meant to help clarify this link between us and our lord and how to help define where many have fallen astray in how to truly understand what it is and what it means. Dr. Ḥātim al-Sharīf eloquently and concisely presents and defends his argument using classical examples to support his claim. This is one of the most influential discussions of such a pivotal concept in the religion of Islām and should serve as a means of clarifying any shortcomings concerning it.



About the Author:

Ḥātim ibn ibn 'Arif ibn Naṣir al-Sharīf is from āla-'Awn which traces its lineage to the Prophet ﷺ descending from Ḥasan ؑ. He was born in Tā'if in (1385H/1965CE) and is married with five children, four daughters and one son, named Muḥammad. He completed his elementary education in Tā'if where he took an interest in ḥadīth at around the age of 13. After coming across the books of Muḥammad Naṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, he was further encouraged in his ḥadīth studies. He attended a number of lectures and classes during his high school years until he was accepted to Umm al-Qura University in 1404H/1983CE and graduated with a degree in al-Kitāb wa al-Sunnah in 1408H/1987CE. He then went on to complete his Master's (1415H/1994CE) and Doctoral (1421H/2000CE) degrees at the same University. He busied himself during his undergrad and graduate years with an enormous amount of reading and studying, taking breaks for prayer and sleep only.

It was in his years (1418H/1997CE and onward) working on his Master's degree where he began teaching and authoring a number of unique works in multiple fields. To date he has authored over 25 works and critical editions and is a teacher at Umm al-Qura University. He has also held a number of titles and positions including:

- General Supervisor of International Committee for the Support of the Final Prophet (ICSFP)
- Consultative Assembly of Saudi Arabia for two separate terms
- Considered one of the top 500 most influential Muslims in the world

